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ABSTRACT

Dance has become a major force of expression among Hispanics in the United States serving the functions of ethnic unity, identity, and cultural expression. As a result, it is increasingly important to define and understand its development and history. This paper provides a universal definition of ethnic dance and a theoretical base upon which to define ethnicity and culture. Next, the genesis and development of an ethnic dance form are addressed, using the Mexican Folklorico Son and Jarabe dance forms as examples. This example leads to a synopsis of the state of the Hispanic Dance in the United States. Finally, the significance and value of ethnic dance are discussed. Several recommendations proposed to the Presidential Task Force on Hispanic American Arts are listed. Among these are that the National Endowment for the Arts should: sponsor informational regional workshops presenting the National Endowment for the Arts and its functions, grantmanship techniques, and contacts in Washington, D.C.; establish four regional offices in the Midwest, Southwest, Northeast, West, and Puerto Rico; establish open communication lines with major Hispanic arts organizations; and establish relevant and realistic criteria through which Hispanic arts organizations can receive grant funds. (NQA)

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HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE
OF THE
HISPANIC DANCE EXPRESSION

DR. LORENZO A. TRUJILLO

A PRESENTATION TO THE PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE ON HISPANIC AMERICAN ARTS, SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS, APRIL, 1979

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HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE
OF THE
HISPANIC DANCE EXPRESSION

By Dr. Lorenzo A. Trujillo

The following was presented to the Task Force on Hispanic American Arts in a symposium titled "An Analysis and Interpretation of the Hispanic American Aesthetic: Origins, Manifestations, and Significance". The symposium was held this past April at the Research Center for the Arts at the College of Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Various artists as well as professors from throughout the U.S. including Puerto Rico were invited to give presentations in the areas of theatre, dance, music, poetry, literature, and the visual arts.

In the presentation that follows a universal definition of ethnic dance is presented, as well as a theoretical base upon which to define ethnicity and culture. In this sense, it has value for all ethnic dance. In the second half of the article the author addresses himself to the genesis and development of an ethnic dance form specifically addressing the folklórico dance form. The final section specifically addresses the value of ethnic dance.

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Dance has become a major force of expression among Hispanics in the U.S. serving the functions of ethnic unity, identity, and cultural expression. As a result, it is increasingly important to define and understand its development and history. More importantly, it is a phenomenon that is causing a significant impact upon thousands of Hispanic Americans. Therefore, an understanding of its power as a language beyond words is a viable and important concern.

Definition and Philosophy of Origin

Dance, specifically ethnic dance, is a phenomenon that has existed since the origin of man, but lacks a definition and understanding. In order to understand its significance, this study must present a statement of definition, history, and value of ethnic dance.

Man is a being of reason. His reason is based on a cultural value system. Culture is learned either through first-hand experiences or vicariously. The total of man's experiences is the history of mankind.

It is through history that culture is learned, established and developed. Culture is defined as "the symbolic system that encodes the values of man at the level of language, social structure, and world view (Seda-Bonilla, 1976, pp. 25-31).

The most tangible symbol and expression of culture is language. For the purpose of this definition, language is here specified to refer to the language of kinetics. Kinetics is the study of all aspects of motion and movement, comprising both kinematics and dynamics. Kinematics is the study of movement and motion exclusive of the influence of mass and force. Dynamics refers to the study of movement and motion in relation to energy and force.

Any human action, in order to make sense as collaboration with others in the attainment of an effect, must be encoded and

the encoding must be a shared understanding of those who collaborate in the activity. Dance is a collaborative activity, the outcome of a shared understanding of what's now and what's next in body language. This body language is described under the rubric of kinemics in analogy to phonemics.[1] The components of the grammar of body language we shall describe as kinemics, the formalization of kinetics.

The combination of these factors comprise the language of kinetics. The Hispanic ethnic dance expression is a member of this language family. The special quality that distinguishes it from just movement must be explained. In order to do so, one must first of all understand the development of dance as a cultural expression.

Man has been dancing since his very beginning. The ancient peoples of the world all danced. Although dance was first employed for religious purposes, it came to be an integral expression in everyday life.

There are many theories about the genesis of dance. When the word dance is used, as compared to movement or kinetics, it implies kinetics with an aesthetic value aspect.

Aesthetic refers to a sense of beauty. The cliche that 'beauty is in the eyes of the beholder' brings us back to the realization that aesthetics are relative to cultural expression and cultural values. Accepting this, one becomes aware that dance is a cultural expression.

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[1]For a treatment of this concept, the reader is referred to Kenneth Pike, Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior, 2nd ed., (The Netherlands: Mouton and Co., the Hague, 1967).

This cultural expression is a language of its own. It is not comparable to verbal expression because it doesn't function within the same or even similar medium. Expression through time, space, and energy is very different from expression through verbs, nouns, and adjectives. Although the medium is very different, the function is the same. Both languages serve the purpose of communication.

As time progressed, man developed a history of events. Naturally, this history was communicated through language. Specifically, as groups of people joined in social structures, group value clusters were created. These clusters developed into basically four social structures. They are: (1) a kinship system; (2) a territorial community; (3) a system of class or social rank; and (4) an ethnic group.

In order to understand ethnic dance, the author will address the fourth social structure as the unique characteristic of aesthetic kinetics that makes dance ethnic. It is from the ethnic group that ethnic dance is derived. The sense of an ethnic group's being is called ethnicity. "Ethnicity is cultural identity" (Seda-Bonilla, 1979). This phenomenon is composed of a shared and agreed to unifying set of values and beliefs that are expressed through the symbols of culture.

Ethnicity is an active state of being in doing.[2] It is an untangible essence that comes from within a person's being. Probably the best way to explain ethnicity is to compare

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[2]For a treatment of the concept of ethnicity, the reader is referred to Seda-Bonilla, "Ethnicity is Cultural Identity", in Ethnopedagogy, Education for Cultural Awareness (San Francisco: Justa Publications, 1979).

it with pseudo-ethnicity through an example.

First of all, an ethnic person is one who upon birth learns an ethnic culture through the expressive symbols of culture. The symbols are language, social structure, and world view. Each of these symbols has meaning through seven aspects of interpretation. They are: (1) general usage; (2) morals; (3) religion; (4) aesthetics; (5) politics; (6) practice; and (7) science.[3] The true ethnic knows the language, social structure, and world view of his target culture. Furthermore, he can evaluate the symbols through the seven aspects of interpretation previously stated. Finally, the ethnic becomes truly ethnic when he actively participates in the projects of his ethnic group in cooperation with others of his group.

On the other hand, a pseudo-ethnic is a person who accepts an ethnic title, but does not know or understand the culture. That is, he is a person who calls himself Mexican, Russian, or whatever, and yet cannot function in the specified target culture. The pseudo-ethnic who does not know the target culture's language, social structure, or world view, also would obviously not be able to interpret the culture either. Therefore, the pseudo-ethnic is one who assumes the title as a type of pseudonym.

Basically, in order to understand ethnicity, it is proposed that one must understand cultural identity. When one

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[3]See Eduardo Seda-Bonilla, The Cultural Construction of Reality (San Francisco: Justa Publications, (in press).

identifies with a culture and actively participates in its projects--such as the language, values, customs, and folkways, for example--he is ethnic. The ethnicity of a person, therefore, becomes an active essence of life from within the individual in collaboration with others.

Each culture has its own sense of ethnicity. Ethnicity, as an expression of culture, communicates itself through the medium of kinetics. But the expression is more than kinetics because it is culturally value laden and specifically presented through the unique language system of the target culture from where it comes.

This is the explained conceptualization of ethnic dance. Ethnic dance is a unique expression of a total history of a people in the specified ethnic cultural language of aesthetic kinetics. Since it is from history that culture is derived, it can be safely concluded that ethnic dance is culture, since the form of expression is a result of history.

Dance ethnologists have been stating this theory in many ways. The basic theory presented is that ethnic dance movements are an amalgamation of the many neuro-muscular coordinations which have been necessary for the survival of the group. These movements have survived through the selective processes of existence. These movements eventually go through a process of creation, popularization, formalization, and finally are polished with aesthetic attributes and stylizations.

One example of this phenomenon is found in the national dance of Greece, "Tsamikos". This dance began as a combination

of warriors' movements of the guerilla soldiers of Epiros. These warriors eventually popularized their exercises. As the popularization grew, aesthetic formalization gave rise to the ethnic national dance of Greece known as "Tsamikos".

Genesis and Development of an Ethnic Dance Form

This process will be specifically addressed using the Mexican Folklórico Son and Jarabe dance forms as examples. This example will lead to a synopsis of the state of the Hispanic Dance in the United States.

The Son and Jarabe of Mexican Folklórico dance are a result of the Mexican syncretic history and culture. Although dates can only serve as approximations, they are valuable in establishing a sense of time. Therefore, an approximate date of August, 1521, is assigned to the birth of this dance form.

The roots of the Mexican Folklórico Son and Jarabe come from European-Spanish and Mesoamerican Indigenous dance expressions. When these two influences joined in a syncretic union, they gave birth to a combined expression which was not visible as a unique entity until about 1750. This expression was established because of a need to communicate a history of racism, prejudice and struggle that was experienced by the Mexican. This form gained much importance especially since the Inquisition did not allow free verbal expression during this epoch. The oppressed Mexican found expression of his sub-human condition in ethnic aesthetic kinetics, that is, in the Mexican Folklórico dance.

During this time the syncretic union of the European and Indigenous civilizations became a visible cultural group known as Mexicans. By 1810, this group chose to revolt against the European influence, and in 1910, a second internal Mexican revolution occurred. It was during this one-hundred year period that the Mexican Folklórico dance became popularized. The early 1900's are known as the Golden Age of the Mexican Jarabe and Son Folklórico dance. It was during this interval that the creative and spontaneous ethnic expression occurred.

By 1934, the dance form was being studied. Formulas and choreographies were established for the dance. It began to lose the spontaneous character that had given it genesis. The Folklórico dance was in the process of becoming formalized.

Finally, during the 1950's various folklore enthusiasts stylized the dance and put it on stage. This polishing gave the dance added aesthetic attributes.

During the late Sixties, an American interest in Folklórico occurred. Prior to this time colonial dances such as La Cuna, Valse de los Paños, and La Comancha, were performed throughout the Southwest U. S.

In Texas and Arizona the norteño polka was and still is very popular. In Colorado and New Mexico, dances such as La Varsovillana and La Raspa were and are still among the current dances of the folk.

Specific regional expressions were prominent in areas such as San Francisco where the Latin samba, cumbia, and salsa forms have been and are danced. Other regional clusters exist

in Los Angeles where the Mexican Folklórico dance is very popular and in New York where the Puerto Rican salsa reigns. Throughout all of the regions exist Spanish dance enthusiasts and groups.

Also, there has been a recent surge in regional groups presenting original choreography depicting the Chicano experience in the United States. Presentations of this type include a combination of Folklórico and modern dance in a unique synthesis of expression. This new movement comes forth from the barrio experience of the city Chicano and is similar to the popular street theatre.

In 1974, a very significant event in the history of Hispanic ethnic dance occurred. Hispanic folklore, dance, and music enthusiasts from Colorado, New Mexico and California joined at the University of New Mexico and founded the Asociación Nacional de Grupos Folklóricos.

This association has become the backbone of the Folklórico movement in the United States. The purpose of the association is to increase the education and understanding of Mestizo, Indian, and Spanish Art, primarily Mexican and Chicano dances, music, and related folklore.

The association now serves approximately 1,200 people from throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico. The organization sponsors regional, national, and international conferences and workshops, a Journal, and provides many support services to its member organizations.

National conferences have been held in the following locales and sponsored by the following people and funds:

YEAR	NATIONAL CONVENTION HOST	LOCATION	FUNDING
1974	Ismael Valenzuela	University of New Mexico, Albuquerque	self-supported
1975	Jane Valdillez	San Jose State Univ. San Jose, California	regional businesses
1976	Lorenzo Trujillo	Sangre de Cristo Arts & Conference Center and Univ. of Southern Colorado, Pueblo, Colorado	National Endowment for the Arts; Colorado Council of the Arts; Sangre de Cristo Arts & Conference Center; Univ. of Southern Colorado; et.al.
1977	Elma Radke	Univ. of Washington Seattle, Washington	Washington State Arts Commission; King County Arts Commission; Centro de Estudios Chicanos; Univ. of Washington; et.al.
1978	Ruben Corona	Kansas State Univ. and Kansas Advisory Commission on Mexican American Affairs Manhattan, Kansas	National Endowment for the Arts; Kansas Arts Commission; Kansas Advisory Commission on Mexican American Affairs; et.al.
1979	Ismael Valenzuela	Universidad de las Americas Puebla, Mexico	self-supported

The following report represents the last membership survey of the Asociación Nacional de Grupos Folklóricos. Please note that this information was current in June of 1977 and is only representative of that time, but serves as an indicator of the growth and unity of the organization after only three years of existence.

Report on 1976-77 ANGF Membership Survey

Group Size and Composition	
1. Average group size	22 members
2. Average number of males	8.8
3. Average number of females	13.7
Dance Experience	
1. Less than one year experience	270 members
2. 1-2 years of experience	235 members
3. 2-3 years of experience	219 members
4. 3 or more years of experience	43 members
5. 4 or more years of experience	57 members
(Note: 1 or more years of experience was defined as attending 2½ hour dance practice sessions twice a week for nine months).	
Funding Sources	
1. Donations	21 groups
2. Grants	5 groups
3. School budget	14 groups
4. Self sustaining	18 groups
5. Membership dues	6 groups
6. Gifts	4 groups
7. Community sponsored	3 groups
8. Endowments	3 groups
9. Government sponsored	1 group
10. Loans	none
General Information	
1. Non-profit organization	34 groups
2. School affiliated	20 groups
3. Approx. #persons represented by ANGF	700
4. Actual membership	30 groups 24 individuals[4]

Note: This information was current as of June, 1977.

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[4]"Report on 1976-77 ANGF Membership Survey", ANGF Journal, Vol. 2, No. 1, Winter, 1977-1978, p. 21.

The Asociación Nacional de Grupos Folklóricos is a totally volunteer organization and is based in grass roots communities throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The organization has not been able to afford a staff or administrators. These are needs that are becoming more and more important as the organization grows.

Significance and Value of Ethnic Dance

From the evolution and history of the Folklórico, one can conclude that it must serve some purpose and value to have grown and developed as it has.

Kraus (1969, p. 12) has stated that dance serves the purposes of social affirmation, religious worship, aesthetic expression, entertainment, physical strength and agility expression, social expression, courtship, education, occupation, and therapy.

Moreover, it is felt that Folklórico dance has served for Hispanics in the United States as a form of release and expression of a history of oppression and for unity in the same way that it originally developed. In this way, it serves for culture maintenance and transmission which stimulates positive self concept and catalyzes cognitive growth.

This occurs because as one participates in the Folklórico dance expression, he/she learns of the history which creates the culture through the language of the ethnic dance. The student further gains an enhanced self concept because of the positive value that is placed on ethnic identity, family

traditions and culture, and all of the categories of the self concept.[5]

Through this process the individual becomes one with a unique ethnic identity. This is especially important in today's society of lost identities and pseudo-ethnics.

In order to further understand the value of Folklórico dance, one must address its essence which is found in the inherent rhythms of life. These rhythms are fundamental to all ethnic dance.

In presenting the concept of ethnic cultural rhythms, one cannot escape the knowledge that all life revolves around rhythmic cycles. The very essence of life is based on a woman's physical cycle. From the moment of conception all things are part of rhythmic cycles, such as a heart beat, time, celebrations, life, and death. As each person is born he/she begins a cycle of life that leads to death, at which time a new life begins. The Chinese see life as a continual birth, death, and rebirth cycle. The Aztecs lived around a fifty-two year cycle. Americans function in a twelve month cycle. The examples are endless of the rhythmic cycles of man, ancient and contemporary.

These rhythms are expressed in all ethnic dance forms. The Croatians have heavy, earthy and slow movements in many of their kolo dances. The Aragoneses have quick, lithe jumping movements in their jota dance. The German and Bavarian polkas are fast and energetic. The dances of the Balanese are exacting, precise, and sharp. The African dance is highly syncopated and is noted for its polyrhythms. The sitting

[5]For further development of this theory, see: Lorenzo Trujillo, The Effect of a Hispanic Ethnic Dance Curriculum upon High School Students' Self Concept and Academic Performance, University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1979.

dances of Micronesia and Samoa are limited in lower body movement, but unlimited and exacting in the movement of the upper body. All of these cases serve to demonstrate the essence and value of the ethnic dance as a fundamentally basic expression of the rhythms of life and culture.

Based on the defined conceptualization of ethnic dance, its history and value, the Hispanic ethnic dance expression is a living and powerful language beyond words through which Hispanic Americans have communicated for centuries and continue to do so with an ever increasing momentum.

With a population of nineteen million and growing, Hispanic art expression merits attention and concern of the National Endowment for the Arts to enhance a cultural wealth that is unique to this country and represents a national treasure of invaluable dimension.

The following is proposed: National Endowment for the Arts should:

1. sponsor informational regional workshops:
    a. presenting the National Endowment for the Arts and its functions;
    b. presenting grantsmanship techniques and more importantly who to contact in Washington D. C.;
2. establish four regional offices in the:
    a. Midwest
    b. Southwest
    c. Northeast
    d. West
    e. Puerto Rico
3. establish open communication lines with major Hispanic arts

organizations, such as the Asociación Nacional de Grupos Folklóricos.

4. create positions for NEA representatives to work outside the NEA offices in the capacity of liaisons with the public in regional communities and organizations to assist on a continuing basis in grantsmanship, organization, arts administration, and more specifically, to facilitate the flow of communication between the NEA and Hispanic arts organizations.
5. establish relevant and realistic criteria through which Hispanic arts organizations can receive grant funds.

In conclusion, the Task Force on Hispanic American Arts, Dr. Jacinto Quirarte, Panel Participants, the National Council on the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities are to be congratulated for this beginning. Let's only hope that this thrust does not end here, but will blossom forth and respond to the growing needs of Hispanic Americans throughout the United States.

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[3]Eduardo Seda-Bonilla, The Cultural Construction of Reality, (San Francisco: Justa Publications, (in press).

[4]"Report on 1976-77 ANGF Membership Survey", ANGF Journal, Vol. 2, No. 1, Winter, 1977-1978, p. 21.

[5]Lorenzo Trujillo, The Effect of a Hispanic Ethnic Dance Curriculum upon High School Students' Self Concept and Academic Performance, University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1979.

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